

REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS
2023 ConnectHomeUSA Virtual Summit
October 26, 2023

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you to Jason for that warm introduction. I'm honored to kick off this third day of HUD's virtual conference. I know you heard yesterday from Secretary Fudge, who highlighted the importance of connecting every household receiving federal housing assistance through the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program. I'm thankful for her continued leadership on this issue. And, I'm excited to echo that call. Simply put, if a household is receiving federal housing assistance, that household should be connected.

We've made great progress getting eligible households connected. Through the FCC and HUD's ongoing partnership, we have made it easier than ever to enroll in ACP. For example, only a couple of months ago, Secretary Fudge and I visited the Yesler Terrace public housing facility in Seattle, Washington. Yesler Terrace is undergoing a major renovation. What was once an underinvested neighborhood in Seattle is being turned into a fantastic community that will eventually include approximately 5,000 apartments across many buildings overseen by the Seattle Public Housing Authority. We met the wonderful residents and staff, and announced a Memorandum of Understanding between HUD and the FCC to enshrine our close work together, and to better share information to help those participating in HUD's federal housing programs enroll in ACP more efficiently.

Here at the FCC, the work continues. As many of you know, last year I created an ACP pilot program focused on increasing program awareness and enrollment. We had fantastic interest in the pilot and there are 23 pilot programs up and running nationwide, including housing authorities in Louisville, Chicago, and Jersey City, NJ. I'm excited they are also participating in this conference to share their experience and expertise. The FCC has also awarded over \$78.5 million in outreach grants and digital navigator grants. We keep on pushing to enroll as many as we can.

And, we've been successful. Thanks to the ACP we have made more progress closing the digital divide in the past two years than ever before. There are now over 21.4 million households enrolled in ACP. And we have made fantastic progress supporting those receiving federal housing assistance. When I announced the ACP Pilot Program last year, about 450,000 households receiving federal housing assistance had signed up. Only a year later, thanks to much hard work, we've enrolled an additional million households receiving federal housing assistance in ACP!

But as Secretary Fudge stated, there is more work to do. Approximately 5 million households receive federal housing assistance and are eligible for ACP. So, I hope we can build on the momentum we have and, with your support, get every one of your eligible households

enrolled. The special position of trust you hold in your respective communities will go a long way.

And in case anyone needs a reminder about why we are undertaking all of this work, it's to help the people you support every day. What you are doing has real-world impact. In my years as a Commissioner, I've learned that there is simply no way to overstate broadband's impact on the lives of individual Americans. Take, for example, "Queen Bea." She is a wonderful resident and community leader that Secretary Fudge and I met at the Yesler Terrace public housing facility I mentioned in Seattle. Talk about a mega-watt smile. Queen Bea experienced homelessness for a number of years. She was able to find housing just as the pandemic started, and critically just as she became ill and lost some of her mobility. She took advantage of that time to go back to school, having previously stopped her formal education in the 8th grade. With a broadband connection, she literally and figuratively "zoomed" through her education and training, and learned how to use a computer and applications like Excel. When we met, she proudly told me that she had become an educator herself in the community—training others on how to utilize and upgrade their computer skills because she wanted to help others learn as well. She told me, "it was a blessing to have the internet." Amen to that.

It's clear—ACP is success and a priority for the Biden Administration. Just yesterday, President Biden officially asked Congress to appropriate another \$6 billion to continue to support the over 21 million households relying on the program. This is a huge deal! I have consistently called for ACP to be re-funded to continue on the fantastic work we have done to connect those most in need. President Biden's leadership will ensure that those already in the program are supported, and that we can continue to sign up even more eligible households so they can take advantage of all the opportunities broadband has to offer. I am also grateful to Secretary Fudge for her dedication to connecting housing residents through Connect USA and the ACP to maximize our reach to disconnected Americans. Thank you for all of your hard work so far, and the hard work to come.